View metadata, citation and similar papers at core.ac.uk

brought to you by CORE

provided by DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Fourth Annual National Conference (1999)

People of Color in Predominantly White Institutions

October 1999

Rounding Up the Usual Suspects: Academia's Version of Driving While Black (DWB)

Cecil E. Canton
California State University, Sacramento

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/pocpwi4

 Part of the Race, Ethnicity and Post-Colonial Studies Commons

Canton, Cecil E., "Rounding Up the Usual Suspects: Academia's Version of Driving While Black (DWB)" (1999). *Fourth Annual National Conference (1999)*. 24.
https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/pocpwi4/24

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the People of Color in Predominantly White Institutions at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Fourth Annual National Conference (1999) by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Rounding Up the Usual Suspects: Academia's Version of Driving While Black (DWB)

Cecil E. Canton
California State University, Sacramento

"In much the same way that law enforcement agents identify Blacks for these routine, but illegal, traffic stops, agents of predominantly white institutions identify the few faculty of color, and 'round up these usual suspects' to ensure that their committees will have the appropriate racial, gender or ethnic representation."

When law enforcement officers wish to conduct a criminal investigation, they may seek information and/ or other evidence from individuals known by them to be involved in or have information about activities germane to their investigation. The act of finding these individuals and bringing them in for questioning is referred to, often humorously, as "rounding up the usual suspects." These individuals, law enforcement agents believe can be relied upon to provide information or a perspective, which is often invaluable in solving the case. They are also useful in giving the press and the public a sense that the law enforcement agency is making progress.

A recent phenomenon, which has begun to get national attention, has involved law enforcement agents singling out African Americans, especially males, for routine traffic stops based solely upon their race. Although this treatment is not news to the Black community, others have discovered that this action flies in the face of the American ideals of equality and fairness. These ideals are at the heart of recent efforts to eliminate "affirmative action" in higher education and other social institutions, except perhaps the prison system. This phenomena has been identified as "Driving While Black" or DWB, a perversion of the more acceptable traffic stop of those apparently "driving while under the influence" (DUI) or "driving while intoxicated" (DWI). It is obvious that "race," as it is socially constructed in America, or skin color, is an important judgment criteria and not something easily changed. Yet, it is at the heart of America's longest tenured and continuing dilemma: judgment of some of its people by the color of their skin, not by the content of their character.

In much the same way that law enforcement agents identify Blacks for these routine, but illegal, traffic stops, agents of predominantly white institutions identify the few faculty of color, and "round up these usual suspects" to insure that their committees will have the appropriate racial, gender or ethnic representation. Although this action my have some apparent positive benefits for insuring that gender, racial and ethnic perspectives are addressed, it also has negative consequences for issues of equity and fairness. This action not only leads in many cases to the complete over commitment of these faculty pulling them away from publishing and research (things considered most important during evaluations for promotion or tenure), but also holds the potential for identifying them as trouble makers, rendering them unable and unfit to effectively speak to issues germane to under represented faculty.

What can be done by faculty of color to minimize the negative consequences of being over subscribed to University committees? What are the social and psychological

impacts of being used and sometimes abused by this process? What are the strategies that can be employed by faculty of color to get the most out of membership on university committees? Finally, what action (s) can be taken to limit their selection through this process?

PRESENTER:

Cecil E. Canton is professor of Criminal Justice at California State University, Sacramento. He has served on that faculty since 1991. Born in Harlem and raised in Amityville, New York, he was educated at the State University of New York at Stony Brook and Columbia University, where he received his doctorate in Educational Administration. Dr. Canton has served in varied administrative capacities in several New York State criminal justice agencies, including the Division for Youth and the Department of Correctional Services. Prior to those assignments he taught elementary school, functioned as a school administrator and served his community as a manager of several community based organizations and as a community organizer and activist.